instances of theft are reduced, and even television is shunned. Peace and tranquility reign in the neighbourhoods and even in market places.

All these changes create a good environment for moral rectification. The bad become less so and the good become better.

Training in Humility

The Quran tells us that fasting is prescribed for you so that you may fear God (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:183). So what does it mean to fear God? Fearing God means that man should acknowledge his helplessness vis-à-vis God's greatness.

The feeling of helplessness (*'ijz*) is not simply a feeling but is rather the greatest motivational force in the life of a person.

The feeling of *'ijz* relates to God. But when this feeling of *'ijz* is produced in man in the real sense, it finds expression in human relations. One who becomes truly modest before God finds this same spirit making him modest before human beings.

The height of spirituality is a person's realization of his own helplessness and the supreme power of Allah. The biggest obstacle to a person's spiritual growth is his own ego and false pride. This leads to his being distanced. The sole concern of a spiritually pure person is his earning God's pleasure.

> The biggest obstacle to a person's spiritual growth is his own ego and false pride.

The Month of Sympathy

The Prophet said: "The month of Ramadan is the month of sympathy."

Fasting teaches a man what basic human requirements are. It tells him what hunger is and what thirst is. Those who do not get a chance to feel hungry or thirsty also experience this during this month. For some hour, the rich also come to live in the same conditions in which a poor man lives.

> The best days of this world are the last ten days of Ramadan.
>
> The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ

Ramadan is thus a process of rejuvenation of a believer. He can look forward to applying the lessons learnt during Ramadan to everyday life. A person who has fasted in the true spirit can count on drawing upon the reservoir of fortitude that he has built up, on the power of dua, of patience and gratefulness when he is faced with any trying situation.

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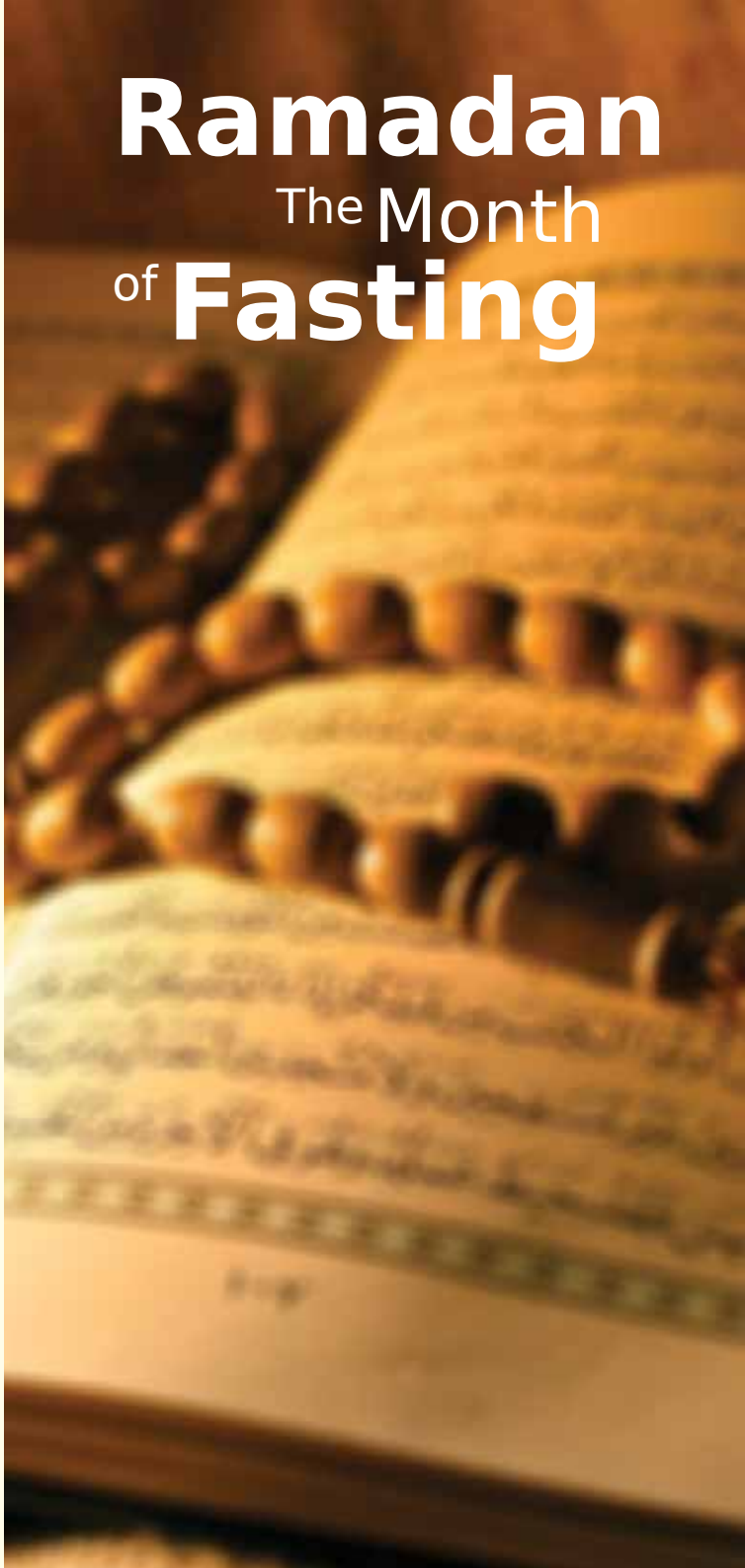

Ramadan
The Month of Fasting

The Spirit of Ramadan

Ramadan – the month of fasting, is a special and blessed month for Muslims. It was in this month that revelations of the Quran began to be made to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, marking the commencement of Prophethood.

Ramadan is a month of restraint and worship; of caring and thanksgiving; of repentance and piety. The multitude of benefits of Ramadan inspired the Prophet to exclaim: "Welcome to the one who purifies!"

Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality. It is a scheme to improve human beings.

Ramadan is a month of spiritual activism when believers endeavour to awaken their spirituality.

The main aim of fasting is to weaken a man's dependence on material things and strengthen his spiritual resolve, so that he may enter the higher realms of piety.

The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ divided the month of Ramadan into three parts. He called the first ten days, "Blessings", the next ten days, "Forgiveness" and the last ten days, "Freedom from hell-fire". The Prophet also said, "The best days of this world are the last ten days (of Ramadan)."

The Month of Supplication

While giving commands regarding fasting, the Quran makes special mention of supplication or *dua*. "And when My servants ask you about Me, say that I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every supplicant when he calls on Me: let them also, with a will, listen to My call, and believe in Me, so that they may be rightly guided." (*Al-Baqarah*, 2:186)

Those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure.

The Quran 39:10

Fasting by its nature, is an act of patience. Patience and forbearance are what lead man to the state of the heart which enables him to experience the feeling of nearness to God. It is only then that words worthy of divine acceptance come to one's lips. Patience is the ground where the blessed tree of *dua* is grown.

Dua is not just a verbal act. In essence, it is an act of the heart. This shows the relation between fasting and dua. Fasting increases the spiritual capability of man's heart and when this capability increases, the dua which ensues is more precious than that of a non-fasting situation. Real fasting is that which induces real dua.

The Essence of Ramadan

According to Islam, man has been put in this world so that he may be put to the test. He has been given freedom so that he may make use of this freedom in following the commandments of God of his own free will.

To pass the test of life, man has to restrict the use of this freedom: he has to promote all that is good and try to eradicate all that is bad. Self-control is needed for this. Fasting is a form of annual training to gain the self-control.

One has to have patience for this self-controlled life. Fasting inculcates in the individual this spirit of patience. On this ground, the month of fasting has been termed in a hadith the month of patience. The most important thing required to lead an Islamic life in this world is patience. For this very reason it was declared in the Quran, "Those who persevere patiently will be requited without measure." (*Al-Zumar*, 39:10)

Fasting teaches a man what basic human requirements are. It tells him what hunger is and what thirst is.

The same glad news of immeasurable reward for patience is also given in a *hadith*. Abu Hurayrah quoted the Prophet as having said "The good deeds of a person will receive tenfold to seven hundredfold reward. But (God, the exalted has said) fasting is (observed) for Me and I will give reward (without measure) for it."

The Month of Contemplation

During Ramadan a dramatic change comes over the Islamic community. Believers are seen sitting inside masjids, reciting the Quran, immersed in prayer (*dua*) and remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*). They become more detached and contemplative. Their boisterous and frivolous urges are curbed.

Man is a social being: he is either encouraged or depressed by his surroundings.

This sea change in communal life during Ramadan therefore affects the individual believer. He is encouraged by the change in his brethren and inclines more and more towards Allah. Believers turn away from common vices – the drinking of alcohol lessens,